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THE DEVELOPMENT OF WILFRID WILSON GIBSON'S POETIC ART

No poet as great as Mr. Gibson executes quite such a volte-face as critics would lead us to believe when they write of "the attitude of Mr. Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, who, starting as the most aristocratic of the 'unacknowledged legislators', suddenly changed his politics and decreed a universal poetic franchise."¹ Of course *Helen in Rhodos* is very different from *Stonefolds*, but even a fragmentary reading of Mr. Gibson's early volumes will show their relation to the later ones—those that most Americans seem to consider all of his achievement. His genius has developed in a natural and logical manner; and he has progressed farther and in more different directions than many critics realize.

Mr. Gibson says that all the poems he wishes to preserve are included in the *Collected Poems* (1917) and in the subsequently published *Hill Tracks* (or *Whin*) and *Neighbours*.² The former is indeed a large and varied enough volume (more than 550 well-filled pages) to represent any poet with honor. Mr. Gibson has been too severe a critic of his own work, however, for some of the

¹Francis Bickley: *Some Tendencies in Contemporary Poetry*, in *New Paths*, edited by C. W. Beaumont and M. T. H. Sadler.

²In the same letter from which this statement is taken, Mr. Gibson writes this autobiography: "I was born on the second of October, 1878, at Hexham in Northumberland, and lived there until 1912. I was educated at private schools and travelled from time to time. In 1912 I went to live in London; but when I married, in 1913, I settled again in the country, this time in the west of England. After being rejected for military service four times, I visited America in 1917, and spent my time from January to July giving readings of my work in various towns and cities. For three months of that time I made Chicago my headquarters. When I returned to England, I again reported myself to the military authorities; I was called up in October, 1917, and served as a private in the Army Service Corps until January, 1919." This brief sketch may be supplemented by stating that Mr. Gibson now lives at Coed Moe, St. Bride's Hill, Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire, England, and that his sister Elizabeth Gibson (Mrs. T. K. Cheyne) began to publish poetry about the same time as her brother, and has written many volumes practically unknown in America. It is interesting to learn that *Daily Bread* is being translated into Japanese.

earlier poems have real value as literature. In order to show the integrity—the unity—of his poetic art, the logical broadening in his choice of subject, and the development of his style, I shall review his work in chronological order. But since Mr. Gibson has now carefully discarded so many of his published poems, I shall not point out all the weaknesses of his earlier writing.

About the first time a poem of his appeared in print was September 4, 1897, when the *Spectator* published *Blind*, afterwards reprinted in *Urlyn the Harper*.³ Although only eighteen years of age, the poet even there showed mature thought and an ability to write in the conventional forms. In fact, those very early poems foreshadow his great work, often by their use of everyday characters and by the sympathy shown for the oppressed or the unfortunate, occasionally by a brevity and a simplicity that suggest the folk poem, and always by an intense sincerity and a delicate sensitiveness that are two of Mr. Gibson's characteristics.

The first volume that he published is *Urlyn the Harper and Other Songs* (1902), the seventh in the Vigo Cabinet Series of Mr. Elkin Mathews. This shows an original and able handling of the materials of poetry and a spontaneity that is very refreshing; but the parts of most value are the second group of the volume, *Faring South*, for these reveal the interest in laborers which was to become so much more intelligent and to be so much more artistically expressed in the well-known later volumes—*Daily Bread* and *Livelihood*. In *The Weary Singers* poets are described as—

“We who have sung to win release, so long
For hearts crushed songless and lips dumb with wrong,
Mouths that have bitten sorrow to the core,
And eyes of keen distress.”

³ Not all of Mr. Gibson's poetry has been published in his books; much is buried in English periodicals, from the rare *Dome* of 1898 to the accessible *New Witness* of to-day. A list of the periodicals in which his work has appeared would include *The Saturday Review*, *The Outlook*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, *The Daily News*, *The Northern Counties Magazine*, *The Week's Survey*, *McClure's Magazine*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, *The Academy*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *The Pilot*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *Country Life*, *The Broadsheet*, *The English Review*, *The Poetry Review*, *The Independent*, *The Living Age*, *The Yale Review*, *The Literary Digest*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

The weary singers foresee that, after they have kept long silence, men will remember them and cry:—

“Why have they left us songless and forlorn
To perish darkling, with no flaming word
Nor song for pilot star?”

The Queen's Vigil and Other Songs is the second volume of Mr. Gibson's poetry, published as the ninth of the Vigo Cabinet Series (1902). The most exquisite lyric of this volume is *Song*:—

“If once I could gather in song
A flower from my garden of dreams—
The dew from its petals unshaken
When starry and bright they awaken—
All men to the wonder would throng.

“Though ever at dawning I go
By the marge of the life-giving streams
That, shadow'd by blossoms upspringing,
Remember the hills in their singing,
The fells of their birth in their flow:

“Or early or late though I fare
To gather my garden of dreams
For the barren, forsaken, and lonely;
I bring from the shadow-world only
Pale blossoms that perish in air.”⁴

The third volume, *The Golden Helm and Other Verse*, published by Mr. Elkin Mathews (1903) is twice as large as either of the preceding. It is interesting to notice that by the time the fourth volume appeared, both *Urlyn the Harper* and *The Queen's Vigil* had gone into the second edition, while no others of the little books in the Vigo Cabinet Series had yet had that distinction. Then they were published together in one volume. Before *The Nets of Love* came out in 1905 as the twenty-eighth of the series, Mr. Gibson had written *Akra the Slave* (1904), which seems not to have been published until 1910. This is the earliest work preserved in the *Collected Poems*. *The Nets of Love*, which contains twelve poems and a six-line prelude, is a

⁴ Reprinted by permission of Mr. Elkin Mathews, London. This poem can also be found in the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, with *Flannan Isle*.

good example of Mr. Gibson's careful and symmetrical plan of arranging his volumes. Here *The Lambing* plainly prefigures the later *Stonefolds*, for, like many others of these poems, it has much of the local color of rural Northumberland in the names, characters and action. In many respects these poems show their close relation to the greater ones that were to follow; they are noticeably free from all traces of decadence; they describe realistically the lives of humble folk; and a strong sense of form is apparent in them.

Stonefolds, Mr. Gibson's first real dramas and the first of the work that most Americans consider typically his, appeared in 1906. It seems only the natural development of an observant and sympathetic poet that, after he had written of his dreams and fancies colored by his travels (as in *The Queen's Vigil* and *The Golden Helm*), he should turn to the people whom he knew in early life, and, in writing of them, should choose the commonest motifs of literature—birth, marriage, and death. His modernity shows in his rejecting as a theme the conventional prenuptial romance and in his discrimination between love and passion. The change (if one is justified even in using the word) from romanticism to realism in Mr. Gibson's poetry did not come suddenly in *Stonefolds*, but gradually; and even then it is really a shifting in emphasis, for a wholesome interest in labor is present in all of his volumes, as is also the artist's feeling for form and color and the other elements of beauty.

The rarest, as well as the most beautifully made, of all Mr. Gibson's books is *The Web of Life*, an "edition of three hundred copies being hand-printed and published by the Samurai Press at Cranleigh, Surrey, January, 1908."⁵ This is the culmination of what critics call the earlier work of Mr. Gibson, the "aristocratic" or the "romantic" style; in other words, it is an outstanding volume of poetry in the conventional English forms and on the traditional themes. The main difference between these poems and his well-known work is that these are nearly all meta-

⁵ This same private press, no longer in existence, printed two other books for Mr. Gibson: *The Stonefolds: A Play*, and *On the Threshold*, both in September, 1907. These two little books include the six short plays entitled *Stonefolds* and printed in one volume by Mr. Elkin Mathews.

phorical, brilliantly ornate and strikingly melodious, although no less sincere and intense than the later simple, less diffuse verses. Two of the most exquisite of this volume are *Helen in Rhodos* and *A Lament for Helen*. In *The Mariners* Mr. Gibson devises a fine long narrative from the tradition that certain mariners at the hour of the Crucifixion heard a voice across the Ionian Sea, crying: "Great Pan is dead!" The old pilot concludes with these prophetic words addressed to the vision of the crucified Christ:—

"The world's youth slowly withers. Gradually
Shall men forget the music and the mirth,
The passionate dance, and pleasurable toil.
No longer with a song upon their lips,
Without foreboding, shall they leap to death,
But move beneath its shadow all their days.
O wounded Body on the cross of wood,
For ever shalt Thou hang against the sky—
The world's eternal agony—that men
Forget not sorrow and despair and death.
Beneath Thy shadow shall the earth grow dark,
And men forget the green and gold and blue,
And live in strange, grey cities of despair,
With jealous hearts and starved, unresting eyes
That prey on one another; and shall slay
Not only with swift weapon in the battle,
But with the slow, deliberate hands of toil."

Thus Mr. Gibson never forgets the tragedies of industrial life, although he can always see life steadily and see it whole, as in the last poem of this volume, *After Sunset*, which closes with these stanzas:—

"Still, darkness holds the heavens; and eastward night
Broods deepest; yet, as we, with groping hands,
Touch one another timidly, a sense
Of imminent dawn thrills unknown seas and lands,
And we await the inevitable light,
With breathless lips and fingers clasped and tense.

"We live through dawns and sunsets: life is not
One day's triumphal progress; though it seem
That we shall look no more upon the sun,
Yet shall we live to realize our dream,
And see old dawns re-orient; this our lot,
To know no end, no last goal lost or won.

"For we are children of eternity
 And not of times and seasons : life and death
 Are but as sunrise and sundown ; we live
 In the universal destiny ; our breath,
 Infinity ; our endless doom, to be
 The immortal quickening in the fugitive."

Mr. Gibson's next work is one of the best known, *Daily Bread*, which suggested the epithet—"the Millet of poets". It appeared first in three parts, and was published both in this form and in one book by Mr. Elkin Mathews in England and by the Macmillan Company in America. This volume has two much quoted explanatory preludes, the first of which accounts for the title:—

"All life moving to one measure—
 Daily bread."

The other prelude is the poetical explanation of Mr. Gibson's development as a writer. The last eight lines show plainly why *Daily Bread* is a different sort of poetry from *Urlyn the Harper* or *The Web of Life*; and they show, moreover, that this change is not a sudden reversal of position, but a progress and an enlargement of vision. The entire prelude is as follows:—

"As one at midnight wakened by the call
 Of golden plovers in their seaward flight,
 Who lies and listens, as the clear notes fall
 Through tingling quiet of the frosty night—
 Who lies and listens, till the wild notes fail ;
 And then in fancy, following the flock
 Fares over slumbering hill and dreaming dale,
 Until he hears the surf on reef and rock
 Break, thundering ; and all sense of self is drowned
 Within the mightier music of the deep,
 And he no more recalls the piping sound
 That startled him from dull, undreaming sleep ;
 So I, first waking from oblivion, heard,
 With heart that kindled to the call of song,
 The voice of young life, fluting like a bird,
 And echoed that wild piping ; till ere long,
 Lured onward by that happy, singing flight,
 I caught the stormy summons of the sea,
 And dared the restless deeps that day and night,
 Surge with the life-song of humanity."⁶

⁶Reprinted by permission of Mr. Elkin Mathews and of the Macmillan Company, who have published in America all of Mr. Gibson's books succeeding this one.

There is a beautiful sense of balance and proportion apparent in Mr. Gibson's books, and a certain unity and completeness appear in each of them. The first part of *Daily Bread* deals with the poor in villages; the second and third parts deal with the struggle in the slums and tenements of the cities, in collieries, and in the country. Injuries, illness, death, and also the warping of mind or distortion of character caused by the struggle for daily bread are all shown with a sincere truthfulness, which does not neglect to show also individual faults and weaknesses not peculiar to the poor. This fairness in characterization does not weaken the appeal of these dramas; rather, it adds to their effectiveness, just as the judicial fairness of Mr. Galsworthy makes his indictments of society the more complete. But there is a simplicity or naturalness about these poems that removes them altogether from propaganda literature. It is also notable that the light that relieves these dark scenes of human life comes always from within the characters themselves, from their strength, love, endurance, or beauty, not from any external incident or chance.

Although most of Mr. Gibson's dramas show more strength in the women than in the men, yet *Womenkind* is most striking for this reason: since, as *The Athenæum* pointed out when it was published, it recognizes "that new solidarity among women which coming centuries will recognize as a marked feature of this, but which many contemporaries still fail to perceive."⁷ This one-act play was written in 1909 and first produced by the Pilgrim Players, a little travelling company of actors organized by Mr. John Drinkwater and Mr. Barry Jackson, which afterwards developed into the Birmingham Repertory Company. Although it has been very successful in both Great Britain and America,⁸ Mr. Gibson has entirely rewritten it recently, but this new version has not yet been published.

Fires, which many readers consider Mr. Gibson's greatest achievement, appeared in 1912. It consists of twenty-one narra-

⁷*The Athenæum*, 1912: 1, p. 281.

⁸*Womenkind* has been played many times at the Neighborhood Theatre, New York, and was produced in Chicago at the Little Theatre by Mr. Maurice Browne. It was first published in England by David Nutt, London, 1912, as number four in the Pilgrim Players Series; in America by the Macmillan Company in 1912.

of degradation to which a freezing woman is pushed when she does a thing that the poet expects to shock the smug reader with pious horror—she steals the clothes from a frozen corpse so that she may pawn them for money to buy food. To give the reader an extra thrill before the lilting stanza ends, Mr. Noyes has a policeman come past while the fallen creature hastily hides the precious shoes and shawl in fear. Contrast that impersonal and conventional succession of verses with Mr. Gibson's poem, which tells no horrible story but shows a real understanding of misery and a true poet's power of interpretation. This is Mr. Gibson's *On the Embankment* :—

“Down on the sunlit ebb, with the wind in her sails, and free
Of cable and anchor, she swept rejoicing to seek the sea.

“And my eyes and my heart swept out with her,
When at my elbow I felt a stir ;
And glancing down, I saw a lad—
A shambling lad with shifty air,
Weak-chested, stunted and ill-clad,
Who watched her with unseeing stare.

“Dull, watery grey eyes he had
Blinking beneath the slouching cap
That hid the low-browed, close-cropped head ;
And as I turned to him he said,
With hopeless hang-dog air :
'Just out of gaol three days ago ;
And I'll be back before I know ;
For nothing else is left a chap
When once he's been inside . . . and so . . .'
Then dumb he stood with sightless stare
Set on the sunlit, windy sail of the far-off boat that free
Of cable and anchor still swept on rejoicing to seek the sea.

“My heart is a sunlit, windy sail ;
My heart is a hopeless lad in gaol.”⁹

Borderlands (1914), in America published with *Thoroughfares*, consists of three plays, in length between *Womenkind* and those of *Daily Bread*. They show exactly the flexibility of style, the humor, the better expression of themes suggested in earlier work, the broadening of interests, that one would expect in the further development of an artist.

⁹ Reprinted by permission of the Macmillan Company and Mr. Elkin Mathews, publishers of *Borderlands* and *Thoroughfares*.

Battle is a highly specialized volume, a unit that makes a single deep impression. Published in November, 1915, it has had the greatest popularity and the highest praise of all of Mr. Gibson's books. Although superlatives may be vain when applied to contemporary art, yet *Battle* is accepted by many as the most remarkable result of the war in literature; or, with Masfield's *August, 1914*, and Rupert Brooke's sonnets, the war poetry of greatest permanent value. Many critics have tried to analyze the means by which the poet achieved this result. One has said that the greatness of the art lies in the fact that each separate vision, although realized in a particular case, has universal range. Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie has described these poems as—

“a series of short dramatic lyrics, written with the simplicity and directness which Mr. Gibson chiefly studies in his exceptional art, expressing, without any implied comment, but with profoundly implied emotion, the feelings, thoughts, sensations of soldiers in the midst of the actual experiences of modern warfare.”¹⁰

With great clarity of vision and the most stringent economy of material, these poems show in order the poignant moments in the life of the individual soldier from the hour before action to his death. Their psychology is admirable. Their comprehensiveness is unusual; all of the experiences of the soldier are represented; there are even glimpses of the home folk and the refugees of war. One of the best of these thirty-one poems is entitled *The Messages*:—

“ I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . . ’

“ Back from the trenches, more dead than alive,
Stone deaf and dazed, and with a broken knee,
He hobbled slowly, muttering vacantly:

“ I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . .

“ Their friends are waiting, wondering how they thrive—
Waiting a word in silence patiently . . .
But what they said, or who their friends may be

¹⁰ In the *Quarterly Review: The War and the Poets*, October, 1915.

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . .'"¹¹

Friends (1916) is the volume dedicated to the memory of Rupert Brooke with the eight verses sometimes called *The Going*. Four exquisite sonnets describe Mr. Gibson's association with this great friend; and most of these poems are distinctly personal. Several are war poems; several, whimsically humorous; but the outstanding features of this volume are the free use of the sonnet form and the growing intimacy and delicacy of feeling.

Livelihood (1916), dramatic reveries, most of which were written before the war, show working people thinking aloud—generally of the past. This volume resembles *Fires* closely in both form and style, but the analysis of character is keener and deeper. The lives, although not happy, are still more hopeful, for, as these folk earned their livelihood,—

"in spite of everything, they learned
To take their luck through life and find it good,"—

as the poet says in his prelude, which dedicates the book to his very young daughter Audrey. Only one of these poems has the battlefield for its scene, the well-known *Between the Lines*; but the war is apparent in several. Probably the finest reverie is that of the Edinburgh upholsterer (in *Makeshifts*) whose artist-soul decided that—

"Life was naught
But toiling for the sixpences that bought
Makeshifts for stars.
.
And yet he—
Though he'd not taken life so easily,
Had always hated makeshifts more or less,
Grudging to swop the stars for sixpences,
And was an old man now, with that old thirst
Unsatisfied—ay, even at the worst
He'd had his compensations, now and then
A starry glimpse: You couldn't work with men

¹¹ Reprinted by permission of Mr. Elkin Mathews and the Macmillan Company from the volume *Battle*.

The reiteration of a memory in the unresourceful, unenriched peasant mind is shown in *Tarras Water*. The superstition of the simple country folk appears in *Merry Eye*, *The Ragged Stone*, *Keilder Stone*, and others. Local tragedies are recounted in the terse, suggestive manner of all folk-poetry, in such poems as *Winter's Stob*, *Scald Hill Cairn*, and *Clattering Ford*. *The Crowder* and *Ho Yoicks* describe the recreations of this kind of life; but what would usually be pictures of happiness or quiet repose are changed to pictures of loneliness or yearning for an absent one in France. The naïve reflections and observations of such people on the war give meaning to such fragments as *The Cheviot*, *Black Stitchel*, and *O What Saw You?* The greater frequency of words denoting motion is not significant of a change in the poet, but is demanded by the style of the folk-song. Nor is this style an artificial convention; for it is true to the character of the country people who, not knowing much mental activity, appreciate only the life of physical action, and associate all their memories with physical activities or sensations of motion. The volume ends with the piercing *Lament*, one of the more subjective of the poems:—

“ We who are left, how shall we look again
Happily on the sun or feel the rain,
Without remembering how they who went
Ungrudgingly, and spent
Their all for us, loved, too, the sun and rain?

“ A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings—
But we, how shall we turn to little things
And listen to the birds and winds and streams
Made holy by their dreams,
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things? ”¹²

Home, the volume produced recently in elaborate form by the Beaumont Press, is a selection of the more personal poems from the other volumes, including the newest book, *Neighbours*. This last, dedicated to the poet's very young son Michael, is a collection arranged under various titles: *Neighbours*, *Chambers*, *Casualties*, *In Khaki*, *Travels*, *Home*, and *Salvage*. The last is so named because six of its poems are reprinted, with some slight

¹² Reprinted by permission of the Macmillan Company.

revisions, from *The Nets of Love*. The title of the first section applies to the whole volume, for all the characters and scenes are treated with that intimacy and sympathetic understanding that we attribute to our relations with our neighbors. In this respect, the book is typical of Mr. Gibson's work; with the exception that there is here included none of the irregularly broken verse of *Daily Bread*, it is also fairly representative of the kinds of his poetry.¹³ For in the first section, we meet the same sort of people that spoke at greater length in *Fires* and *Livelihood*; *Chambers* recalls *Friends* and *Thoroughfares*; *Casualties* and *In Khaki* deal with the war, but are not limited in themes as is *Battle*.

Mr. Gibson, however, never actually returns to his earlier writing, nor does he stand still in his art. His successive volumes always show a development, sometimes a broadening in theme or style, sometimes a specialization. His *Neighbours* shows not so often the usual feelings and thoughts as the more complex emotions or subtle moods that are difficult to account for and to analyze; and, when there is suffering, it is generally mental. In this more restricted field there is still much variety in the themes. These 'neighbours' recall the people in *Stonefolds* or *Daily Bread*, mainly because they have the wholesome, almost Shavian, philosophy of *Katherine Weir*:—

"Though I have been a none-too-happy wife,
And now my children grow away from me,
Bringing to old age fresh anxiety,
I have been used ; and to be used by life,
Even ill-used and broken utterly
With every faith betrayed and trust abused,
Is a kinder lot than in security
To crumble coldly to the grave, unused."¹⁴

Much of the charm of these poems lies in their delicate and beautiful pictures, like *Ralph Lilburn*, and in their fineness of

¹³ A really representative selection of Mr. Gibson's work is a new little volume called *Twenty-Three Selected Poems*, published as Number II of the Westminster Classics, by the Athenæum Literature Department, London. It is edited with a good introductory note by Mr. Ernest E. Taylor.

¹⁴ Reprinted, as are the succeeding four poems, by permission of the poet, from *Neighbours*, published by the Macmillan Company.

touch and economy of line, which make *Ellen Chandler*, *Sam Hogarth*, or *Anthony Earnshaw* remind one of cameos and miniatures, with names that are admirably suited to the characters. These thirty poems are a series of portraits of everyday people made significant by the poet's sympathetic and keen knowledge of their lives. The greater part of this last volume is explained by the sonnet *Chambers*, or, better, by the second sonnet of *Windows*:—

“If I could live within the ray of light
That runs through all things everlastingly—
Not only glimpse in moments of clear sight
The glancing of the golden shuttles that ply
’Twixt things diverse in seeming, stars and mud,
Innocence and the deed in darkness done,
The victim and the spiller of the blood—
The light that weaves the universe in one,
Then might my heart have ease and rest content
On the golden upland under the clear sky:
But ever must my restless days be spent
Following the fugitive gleam until I die—
Light-shotten darkness, glory struck from strife,
Terror to beauty kindling, death to life.”

It is the following of this fugitive gleam that suggests the many striking contrasts, the vivid and brilliantly colored pictures, the unusual resemblances and strange reflections that appear in *Chambers*, *Travels* and *Khaki*. In these sections the reader can trace Mr. Gibson's experiences of 1917 and 1918, his travels in America, return to England, and service in the war. In fact, this is the first book to show his reaction to the beauty of the sea and of foreign lands, since his very earliest little volumes that were much more objective in style.

In *Neighbours*, as in many of the collections, there are a number of lyrics that would make effective and excellent texts for songs: *Return*, *Dream-Come-True*, *The Empty Cottage*, the two poems called *Song*, and *Challenge*. There are many exquisite sonnets: *Driftwood*, *Bacchanal*, *By Lake Michigan*, *Wings*, and the two about Rupert Brooke entitled *Rugby, 1917*. The success with which Mr. Gibson presents an abstraction by using color and definite images is shown in the poem *Inspiration*:—

"On the uttermost far-flung ridge of ice and snow
 That over pits of sunset fire hangs sheer
 My naked spirit poises, then leaps clear
 From the cold crystal into the furnace glow
 Of ruby and amber lucencies, and dives
 For the brief moment of ten thousand lives
 Through fathomless infinities of light,
 Then cleansed by lustral flame and frost returns;
 And for an instant through my body burns
 The immortal fire of cold white ecstasy,
 As down the darkening valley of the night
 I keep the old track of mortality."

Only by a comprehensive view of his work can one appreciate Mr. Gibson's great versatility—in form as well as in content. For he has used with marked success varying verse and stanza forms as well as free verse of many styles. Already in *The Web of Life* he showed himself a master of that traditional poetic diction; in *Fires* and *Livelihood* his diction is a newer realistic sort, still poetic. It has been much discussed; but one need only say that while simple, it is always sufficiently ornate and varied for the purpose; and it is artistic, for the words never obtrude themselves upon the reader's attention. Like his verse form, his diction is often unusual in that it is finely adapted to the mood and thought, and the thought is not always the usual poetic idea that we have been trained to expect. His work does not suffer from diffuseness; on the contrary, to his rigorous economy of expression and material is due much of the extraordinary appeal or the intensity of his poetry. An example of this simplicity and compression of form is the fine little poem *Dream-Come-True*, from *Neighbours*:—

"Dearest, while it would sometimes seem
 As if I really had the art
 Of putting into words the dream
 That fills another's heart;

"And though in its own dream-come-true
 My heart sings ever like a bird's,
 The wonder of my life with you
 I cannot put in words."

Mr. Gibson, moreover, has written well in all three kinds of poetry—dramatic, epic, and lyric. He has written of widely dif-

ferent places, of many themes; he has not confined himself to poems about the poor. But inasmuch as few poets have written of the industrial classes (and none better than he has done), this part of his work is most distinctive.

The respect in which Mr. Gibson shows greatest originality is referred to often by calling him the most artistic of sociologist-poets, although the connotation of this phrase is unfortunate and distasteful to the poet himself. He has written about nearly all kinds of laborers, but he never has had the attitude of a scientific investigator, a cataloguer of human ills, a well-meaning onlooker in search for material. As he says, he has written merely of the people he knew. But he knew these people sympathetically and thoroughly. One would need only to review the work (sometimes merely scattered poems) of such poets as Crabbe, Wordsworth, Hood, Ebenezer Elliott, Mrs. Browning, Robert Buchanan, Whitman, Carpenter, Davidson, and Mr. Frost—not to name the little-known writers like Charles Jones, Joseph Skipsey, Robert Blatchford, and Carter—to see that in art, in truth, and in comprehensiveness Mr. Gibson surpasses most of them as a poet of the people.

This suggests another feature of Mr. Gibson's work. Although his early writing shows the assimilation of the past masters of English verse, as would that of all young English poets, yet he is singularly free from so-called literary influences. Nor can he be named a member of the "Masefield school of poets"—even if there is such a thing—for he and Mr. Masefield began to publish about the same time and each developed independently in his own direction. Neither is Mr. Gibson a theorist about prosody. When I read what must be, technically speaking, "homophonic prose" on how to write poetry, I recall Mr. Bernard Shaw's statement: "He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches." Mr. Gibson does—write poetry.

When critics begin to enumerate special features of Mr. Gibson's poetry, they generally examine only a part and then seize on some idea that is of minor significance, such as the poet's keen sensitiveness to color. Now color must always be prominent in the descriptive passages of all great poetry, for it is the pictorial element best suited to expression in words. It is

only to be expected that poets should use color with greater freedom and success than form, value, or composition, all of which are available to the painter. It is true that Mr. Gibson has excelled in the use of color; but he has excelled in other respects also, and his skilful handling of color is no more marked than his achievements in other directions.

Mr. Gibson is the notable example of a man who has the understanding born of sympathetic imagination, which Mr. Galsworthy once said was the greatest possession in life. And, like him, Mr. Gibson portrays the wrongs of society without proposing remedies. Like all poets of the first order, he seldom moralizes and never preaches. He shows his universality as well as his modernity in the absence of the trappings of orthodox theology. His greatness appears in his artistic detachment from his characters: no poet could understand and sympathize more with them, but they are never used as mouthpieces for their creator. He never thrusts himself into his work: the reader can only conjecture his personality from his choice of subject and manner of treatment. His magnanimity is shown by his entire lack of all condescension, scorn, or contempt for any human being. His poise as an author is shown by his freedom from all obsessions—such as mysticism, religion, sex, pessimism, or a special doctrine concerning art—which disfigure the work of many modern writers. But what makes probably the deepest impression on a student of Mr. Gibson's work is the delicate sensitiveness and purity of his thought and feeling—distinguishing characteristics of the best poets in all ages.

GERALDINE P. DILLA.

Alabama Technical Institute and
College for Women.